

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 /064 W

-----026890 131211Z /10

R 130932Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9166

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 MANILA 19626

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, RP

SUBJECT: PRELUDE TO DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM

REF: A) MANILA 17268, B) MANILA 17706

1. SUMMARY: FILIPINOS WILL VOTE DECEMBER 17 ON WHETHER OR NOT PRESIDENT MARCOS SHOULD CONTINUE IN OFFICE. DESPITE THE GOVERNMENT'S INTENSE EFFORT TO DRUM UP PUBLIC INTEREST, THERE IS STILL MASSIVE INDIFFERENCE TO THE EXERCISE. THE PUBLIC'S APATHY IS NOT SURPRISING; IT IS FORGONE CONCLUSION THAT THE RESULT WILL BE OVERWHELMING "YES" VOTE. THE POLLING IS BUT A MINOR AND PROBABLY UNNECESSARY STEP IN MARCOS' CAUTIOUS STRATEGY OF POLITICAL "NORMALIZATION". MARCOS FELL BACK ON THE TRIED AND TRUE REFERENDUM FORMULA ONLY TO SAVE FACE AFTER PROMOTING SPECULATION HE WOULD HOLD A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. MOST NOTEWORTHY ASPECT OF THE PRE-REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN THE GOVERNMENT'S OVEREAGER ATTEMPT TO

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ENCOURAGE A DEBATE ON "REFERENDUM ISSUES." OPPOSITION LEADERS ARE UNDERSTANDABLY RELUCTANT TO MAKE IT APPEAR THIS IS A REAL CONTEST, AND HAVE URGED THEIR SUPPORTERS TO BOYCOTT THE EXERCISE.

END SUMMAY

1. WHY A REFERENDUM?

FILIPINOS WILL GO TO THE POLLS ON DECEMBER 17 TO VOTE "YES" OR "NO" ON A SINGLE QUESTION: "DO YOU VOTE THAT PRESIDENT FERDINAND E. MARCOS CONTINUE IN OFFICE AS INCUMBENT PRESIDENT AND BE PRIME MINISTER AFTER THE ORGANIZATION OF THE INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA AS PROVIDED FOR IN AMENDMENT NO. 3 OF THE 1976 AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION?" THE RESULTS ARE A FOREGONE CONCLUSION. IN THE FIVE REFERENDA HELD UNDER MARTIAL LAW, THE GOVERNMENT-ENDORSED POSITION HAS NEVER RECEIVED LESS THAN 87 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. TWO PREVIOUS REFERENDA (JULY 1973 AND FEBRUARY 1975) ASKED ESSENTIALLY THE SAME QUESTION AS THE UPCOMING EXERCISE, AND THE RESULTS WERE 90.6 PERCENT AND 87.52 PERCENT, RESPECTIVELY, IN FAVOR OF MARCOS CONTINUING IN OFFICE. THUS, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT, DESPITE AN INTENSIVE EFFORT BY THE GOVERNMENT TO STIR UP INTEREST, THERE IS MASSIVE INDIFFERENCE TO THE DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM. INDEED, MOST OBSERVERS SEEM MYSTIFIED AS TO WHY PRESIDENT MARCOS HAS CHOSEN TO GO THROUGH WITH SUCH A MEANINGLESS EXERCISE.

3. THERE IS GOOD REASON FOR MYSTIFICATION. THE REFERENDUM IS OF CONFUSED PARENTAGE. ITS ORIGIN CAN BE TRACED BACK TO THE WORLD PEACE THROUGH LAW CONFERENCE IN AUGUST. WITH MUCH FANFARE, MARCOS ANNOUNCED AT THAT CONFERENCE THAT THERE WOULD BE LOCAL ELECTIONS "BEFORE THE END
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OF NEXT YEAR." SHORTLY THEREAFTER, MARCOS LET IT BE KNOWN HE WAS CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY OF HOLDING NOT LOCAL BUT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. WHETHER OR NOT MARCOS WAS SERIOUS ABOUT THIS MAY NEVER BE KNOWN; MANY OF HIS CLOSE ADVISORS SEEMED TO BELIEVE HE WAS. THERE FOLLOWED TWO MONTHS OF PUBLIC DISCUSSION, FUELED BY THE MEDIA, ABOUT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. BUT BY OCTOBER MARCOS EVIDENTLY HAD CHANGED HIS MIND. ONE USUALLY RELIABLE SOURCE CLAIMS A SECRET, INFORMAL SURVEY COMMISSIONED BY MARCOS SHOWED HE MIGHT LOSE A FREE ELECTION. HAVING PUFFED UP THE PUBLIC'S EXPECTATIONS OF A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, MARCOS CHOSE NOT TO BURST THE BALLOON BUT RATHER TO DEFLATE IT. HE THEREFORE TOLD THE OCTOBER SPECIAL SESSION OF THE BATASANG BAYAN THAT HIS LEGAL EXPERTS ADVISED HIM A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WOULD NOT BE CONSTITUTIONALLY FEASIBLE AND PROPOSED INSTEAD A REFERENDUM. TO GENERATE INTEREST, MARCOS VOWED THAT IN EVENT OF A "NO" VOTE, HE WILL IMMEDIATELY LIFT MARTIAL LAW, CALL ELECTION OF THE INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA (NATIONAL LEGISLATURE) "WITHIN A MONTH," AND RESIGN AS

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USIA-06 AID-05 /064 W
-----026999 131211Z /10

R 130932Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

PRESIDENT, RETURNING TO HIS HOME PROVINCE TO RUN FOR
A SEAT IN THE LEGISLATURE.

4. AN ADDED TWIST IN THE UPCOMING REFERENDUM IS THAT THE
PEOPLE WILL BE ASKED TO APPROVE BOTH MARCOS AS PRESI-
DENT AND MARCOS AS PRIME MINISTER. FROM THE BEGINNING OF
MARTIAL LAW, MARCOS' CONSTITUTIONAL DILEMMA HAS BEEN HOW
TO REVIVE THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT WITHOUT
GIVING UP HIS FORMIDABLE MARTIAL LAW POWERS. OVER THE
PAST FIVE YEARS, HE HAS BEEN CARRYING OUT A COMBINATION
OF CHESS MOVES DESIGNED TO ENSURE THAT WHEN A LEGIS-
LATURE IS SET UP IT WILL BE A) DOMINATED BY MARCOS
LOYALISTS, AND B) UNDER THE THUMB OF THE EXECUTIVE. THE
TRANSITORY PROVISIONS OF THE 1973 CONSTITUTION SPECIFIED
THAT THE PRESIDENT SHALL CONVENE AN INTERIM NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY (INA) TO WHICH THE PRE-MARTIAL LAW SENATORS
AND REPRESENTATIVES WOULD BELONG. LOATH TO CONVENE AN
ASSEMBLY IN WHICH HIS OLD POLITICAL RIVALS COULD ATTACK
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HIM, MARCOS TEMPORIZED (THE CONSTITUTION DOES NOT

SPECIFY WHEN THE PRESIDENT MUST CONVENE THE INA.) THEN, VIA THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS APPROVED IN THE OCTOBER 1976 REFERENDUM/PLEBISCITE, HE ABOLISHED THE INA AND REPLACED IT WITH THE INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA, WHOSE MEMBERS WILL EITHER BE APPOINTED BY THE PRESIDENT OR CHOSEN IN NEW WLECTIONS. THE OCTOBER 1976 AMENDMENTS ALSO CONFERRED EXTRAORDINARY POWERS UPON "THE INCUMBENT PRESIDENT," SPECIFYING THAT HE SHALL BE PRIME MINISTER AFTER THE INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA IS ORGANIZED WHILE CONTINUEING TO EXERCISE THE POWERS VESTED IN THE PRESIDENT UNDER THE 1935 CONSTITUTION. THESE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR A PLIANT LEGISLATURE MARCOS CAN LIVE WITH, AND THE PRESIDENT HAS NOW PROMISED LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS BY APRIL OR MAY 1978. BUT MARCOS, WHO IS FREQUENTLY GUILTY OF OVERKILL, PROBABLY REALIZES THAT COMBINING THE OFFICES OF PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER IS GOING TO PROVOKE CRITICISM IN THE FUTURE AND WANTS TO FIRM UP HIS PROSITION ON THIS SCORE NOW. HENCE, THE DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM IS WORDED SO AS TO GIVE EXPLICIT APPROVAL TO MARCOS AS PRESIDENT-PRIME MINISTER.

6. EFFECTS OF MARTIAL LAW LIFTED. PERHAPS THE MOST INTERESTING ASPECT OF THE PRE-REFERENDUM "CAMPAIGN" HAS BEEN THE GOVERNMENT'S EAGERNESS TO STIMULATE DEBATE. AS USUAL, MARCOS ANNOUNCED LIFTING OF THE EFFECTS OF MARTIAL LAW FOR DISCUSSION OF REFERENDUM ISSUES. THE COMMISSION ON ELECTIONS HAS SPONSORED A SERIES OF OPEN FORUMS IN THE MAJOR PROVINCIAL CAPTIALS. MARCOS LOYALISTS AND THE MEDIA HAVE BEEN GOADING THE OPPOSITION TO SPEAK OUT. LEADING OPPOSITIONISTS SUCH AS MACAPAGAL, SALONGA, AND ROXAS, HAVE COMMENTED PUBLICLY ON THE REFERENDUM, CALLING IT A MEANINGLESS FARCE AND URGING

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BOYCOTT. ALMOST EVERY OPPOSITION SPEECH HAS BEEN REPORTED IN RELATIVELY UNBIASED FASHION ON FRONT PAGES OF THE MANILA DAILIES. AS A RESULT, MORE ANTI-GOVERNMENT COMMENT HAS APPEARED IN THE PRESS DURING PAST FEW WEEKS THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE MARTIAL LAW, HOWEVER, EVERY DEBATING POINT MADE BY OPPOSITION HAS PROVOKED A FLOOD OF REPLIES FROM MARCOS' POLITICAL SUPPORTERS (ENRILE, RONO, TOLENTINO, PEREZ, ET AL) AND LEADING POLITICAL COLUMNISTS. NET EFFECT HAS BEEN TO MAKE OPPOSITION LOOK INEFFECTUAL, BUT ALSO TO MAKE GOVERNMENT APPEAR OVEREAGER AND TO REINFORCE OPPOSITIONISTS' CONTENTION THAT AS LONG AS THERE IS MARTIAL LAW AND A CONTROLLED PRESS THEY SIMPLY CANNOT WIN.

7. NEVERTHELESS, THE LEGAL OPPOSITION HAS BEEN PERCEPTIBLY EMBOLDENED BY THE TEMPORARILY RELAXED GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE

TOWARD CRITICISM. FORMER PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL, WHO WAS SILENT DURING FIRST FEW YEARS OF MARTIAL LAW, HAS BEEN THE MOST VOCAL OPPONENT. SENATOR ROXAS ALSO HAS EMERGED FROM POLITICAL HIBERNATION. THOSE OPPOSITIONISTS WHO HAVE BORNE THE BRUNT OF THE ANTI-MARCOS EFFORT, SUCH AS SENATORS SALONGA , AND DIOKNO, HAVE CONTINUED TO SPEAK OUT, BUT WHEREAS A YEAR AGO THE PRESS IGNORED THEIR REMARKS, OF LATE IT SEEMS EAGER TO REPORT THEIR EVERY SPEECH.

8. DESPITE THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS, THE ATMOSPHERE IS STILL FAR FROM ONE OF FREE AND OPEN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS. MARCOS' OPPONENTS ARGUE THAT THE PRESIDENT IS NOT ABOVE

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USIA-06 AID-05 /064 W
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R 130932Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9168
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y(PARA NINE GARBLED)

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

PROSECUTING THEM AFTER THE POLLING FOR REMARKS MADE DURING THE "FREE DEBATE" PERIOD. SALONGA TURNED DOWN AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A LIVE TELEVISION DEBATE ON DECEMBER 14, AND IT SEEMS LIKELY MACAPAGAL AND ROXAS, WHO HAVE ALSO BEEN INVITED, WILL FOLLOW HIS LEAD. AT LEAST ONE OPPOSITIONIST COMPLAINED THAT WHEN HE ATTEMPTED TO ORGANIZE A PUBLIC MEETING IN A PROVINCIAL TOWN HE WAS DENIED A PERMIT BY THE MAYOR. THE MANILA PRESS CARRIED TWO OTHER TELLTALE INDICATIONS OF HOW THE

CAMPAIGN HAS PROCEEDED IN THE PROVINCES. ONE WAS PHOTO OF "INFORMATION DRIVE" AMONG MATIGSALUG TRIBE OF MINDANAO. PHOTO SHOWED ENTIRE TRIBE, IN RESPONSE TO CUE FROM TRIBAL LEADER, RAISING HANDS TO INDICATE "YES" VOTE. CAPTION NOTED THAT "ALL OVER THE HINTERLAND, NON-MUSLIM HILL TRIBES ARE ENGAGE IN THE SAME EXERCISE." PRESS ALSO REPORTED THAT DURING MEETING WITH MRS. MARCOS, 1,000 CONFIDENTIAL

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BARANGAY LEADERS PLEDGED OVERWHELMING "YES" VOTES IN THEIR BARANGAYS.

10. PROBABLY OUTCOME. OUTCOME OF REFERENDUM IS NOT IN DOUBT. MARCOS WILL WIN OVERWHELMING VOTE OF APPROVAL. TWO QUESTIONS OF MARGINAL INTEREST RE TOTAL VOTER TURNOUT AND SIZE OF "YES" MARGIN. WITH CHARACTERISTIC THOROUGHNESS, MARCOS HAS BEEN CAMPAIGNING VIGOROUSLY FOR "YES" VOTE. (IN LAST-MINUTE BID TO WIN MORE VOTES OF THE URBAN POOR, MARCOS ANNOUNED DECEMBER 12 REDISTRIBUTION OF DISPUTED LAND TO TENANTS IN QUEZON CITY AND AMENDMENT OF EXPROPRIATION OF ALL SLUM AREAS WHOSE PRIVATE OWNERS DO NOT PARTICIPATE IN UPGRADING PROGRAM). SEVERAL MARCOS LOYALISTS HAVE BILLED EXERCISE AS "DRY-RUN" FOR MARCOS VOTE-GETTING MACHINE. IF EVERYTHING GOES WELL, THEY REASON, MARCOS WILL INTERPRET THIS AS SIGNAL TO PROCEED WITH LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE ARE INDICATIONS OF INDISCIPLINE IN THE PROVINCES-- IF BARANGAY CAPTAINS HAVE DIFFICULTY GETTING GOOD TURNOUT OR IF THERE ARE MORE "NO" VOTES THAN ANTICIPATED-- MARCOS MIGHT STALL ON ELECTIONS. FROM THIS PERSPECTIVE, POOR RESULTS WOULD PERHAPS BE ANYTHING LESS THAN 76 PERCENT TURNOUT AND IT PER CENT "YES" VOTE. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM WILL PROVE TO BE ONE OF THE MOST QUICKLY FORGOTTEN OF THE NEW SOCIETY'S POLITICAL EXERCISES. NEWSOM

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REFERENDUMS
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
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Expiration:
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Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 MANILA 17268, 77 MANILA 17706
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
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Review Event:
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Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 259123
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRELUDE TO DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM
TAGS: PINT, RP
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/7cabc305-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009